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XXVII.—*On the Psittaci of the Mascarene Islands.*

By ALFRED and EDWARD NEWTON.

(Plate VI.)

UNUSUAL interest attaches itself to the members of the Order *Psittaci* indigenous to the Mascarene Islands from the fact that, while all of them are species peculiar thereto, the great majority have either already become extinct within the last two hundred years or must be regarded as expiring. A good deal of misapprehension, too, prevails as to the proper habitat of some of them; and this it may be desirable to correct.

The Mascarene Islands are most conveniently considered to form three groups:—(1) the Seychelles; (2) Mauritius and Réunion (formerly Bourbon)—which, from their proximity, should be taken together, though there is much difference in the *ornis* of each; and (3) Rodriguez. The first group consists of an archipelago, the Land-birds of which have before been treated in this journal (*Ibis*, 1867, pp. 335–360); the second group, of the two islands just named—Mauritius, with a few subsidiary islets attached, and Réunion, having no such appendages, but rising from deep water without even the intervention of a coral-reef. The third group is composed of one

main island almost surrounded by reefs and beset by several small islets.

Of the Parrots of the Seychelles nothing new is now to be added to what has been said of them in the paper above mentioned. A few more specimens of each of their peculiar species, *Coracopsis barklyi* and *Palæornis wardi*, have come into our hands; and we gladly avail ourselves of the Editor's offer here to illustrate both sexes of the latter (Plate VI.), one of the finest members of the genus. It is certain that, owing to the clearing-away of the natural forests and replanting of the ground with cocoa-nuts—which do not contribute to the subsistence of the Parrots—both species are decreasing in numbers. Add to which the fact that they are everywhere ruthlessly killed by the people as opportunity offers, on account of the damage they do to the crops of Indian corn, and there cannot be much doubt that they are doomed to extinction.

The Mauritian fauna once included two Parrots. The large species described by Prof. Owen (Ibis, 1866, p. 168) from a fragmentary mandible found with Dodos' bones in the Mare aux Songes, has had more light thrown upon it by recent investigations; and M. Alphonse Milne-Edwards in 1866 (Ann. Sc. Nat. ser. 5, vi. pp. 91–111) proved that it could not be referred to any of the established genera or subgenera of *Psittaci*. A few other bones of it—a second mandible and a tibia being the chief—have since been discovered (*op. cit.* xix. art. 3, p. 25), and two very characteristic figures of it have been recognized by Prof. Schlegel in the MS. journal of an ancient Dutch voyager (Ibis, 1868, pp. 503, 504). Drawings of these show that the bird had a frontal crest of a shape quite unlike, so far as we are aware, that found in any other form of Parrot, and suggest that it had wings so short as possibly to be inadequate for flight. It has hence been proposed to be regarded as forming a distinct genus (P. Z. S. 1875, p. 350), and it will probably stand as *Lophopsittacus mauritianus* (Owen), under which name it has lately been figured (Encycl. Brit. ed. 9, iii. p. 732). There is no doubt that this bird has long been extinct.

A smaller species of Parrot—commonly known as *Palæornis eques*—still survives in Mauritius, but its numbers are gradually failing, though in the district of Grand Port, where the monkeys have been thinned, it seems to be enjoying a transient prosperity. It is shy, and frequents the forests only, retiring before cultivation. It appears to feed exclusively on the seeds and fruits of the indigenous trees, generally keeping to their upper branches*. When going from one place to another it usually flies high, over the tree-tops and out of gun-shot, uttering a short call-note, “kek,” “kek,” repeated quickly four or five times, and something like that of a Water-hen (*Gallinula*). While feeding or sitting on the tops of the tall trees it not unfrequently whistles melodiously.

To the excellent diagnosis and description of this species by Dr. Finsch (Papag. ii. pp. 35–40), from specimens in our collection, little is to be added; but, in consequence of Mr. Hume’s appeal (Stray Feathers, ii. p. 15), we may state that the example described by the former as “Jüngerer ♂ (oder ♀)” was one of the earliest we obtained, and was thus doubtfully marked before it was submitted to his examination. We now believe it to be an adult female, and may say that that sex seems to differ from the adult male in having a black bill, a very slight trace of the male’s black gular ring, but none of his red or blue collar, and that in general colour she is as intensely green as he is. We have a young male which is hardly distinguishable from the female, except that the bill is blackish-brown, while in another the red is beginning to show itself at the base, though there is not a trace of the black ring. Through the kindness of Mr. Caldwell we have two eggs of this species, which were taken with the mother from the nest in a hole of a tree. They measure 1·26 by 1·04 and 1·24 by 1·04 respectively, and are of the lack-lustre white usual among the eggs of this Order of birds.

* In only one instance did I ever see a “Catau” (as its name should be spelt, not Carteau) in the low brushwood. Littré (Dict. de la Langue Française) says of this word:—“*Catau*. Fille de ferme ou d’auberge. Fille malpropre et de mauvaise vie. Abréviation populaire de Catherine.” —E. N.

Here it is to be remarked that the specific term *eques*, conferred by Boddaert on the subject figured in the 'Planches Enluminées' (No. 215), properly belongs to the Parrakeet of Réunion—the bird there represented being called "*Perruche de l'île de Bourbon*," whence De Buffon (Hist. Nat. Ois. vi. p. 144) expressly says it was brought, identifying it also with the "*Perruche à collier de l'Isle de Bourbon*" of Brisson (Orn. iv. p. 328, pl. xxvii. fig. 1), who likewise states that it is found there. It now no longer inhabits Réunion, and whether a specimen from that locality anywhere exists is not known to us. Judging from the general dissimilarity of the avifauna of that island and of Mauritius*, we should be inclined to suppose that each had its peculiar *Palæornis*; and, in the event of this being found to be the case, we would venture to suggest the term *echo*† being applied to the Mauritian bird, which, no doubt, answers in nearly all particulars to the true *eques*.

It has just been stated that the *Palæornis* is extinct in Réunion. That island, indeed, is at present destitute of any indigenous Parrot; for though M. Maillard ('Notes sur l'île de la Réunion,' p. 162) includes *Coracopsis vasa* as being found there, it has obviously been introduced thither from Madagascar‡. But Parrots there were once, and of several species,

* The only indigenous species of Land-birds common to the two islands are, we believe, *Collocalia francica*, *Phedina borbonica* and *Tchitrea borbonica*. The *Hypsipetes*, the *Oxynotus*, and all the species of *Zosterops* are distinct. The original *Foudia* of Réunion (*Emberiza borbonica*, Gmel. Syst. Nat. i. p. 886, founded on the *Mordoré* of De Buffon, Hist. Nat. Ois. iv. p. 366, Pl. Enl. 321. fig. 2) we have never seen, the species now found in the island being *F. madagascariensis*, believed to be an importation.

† Ἠχώ, *nympha quædam, imitatrix equitis*—sc. Narcissi. Ov. *Metam.* iii. 380.

‡ The introduction of the other species of *Coracopsis* seems also to have been once effected; for in the 'Voyage dans les quatre principales îles des mers d'Afrique' of Bory de St. Vincent, performed in 1801 and 1802, where the author is telling of an excursion in Réunion, we have this passage (i. pp. 350, 351):—"Nous nous étions arrêtés un instant pour tuer des merles [*Hypsipetes borbonicus*, of course], dont nous trouvions une prodigieuse quantité, lorsque j'entendis quelques sifflemens aigres, que notre guide me dit être ceux d'une espèce de perroquet noir; nous nous

in Bourbon; and the proper *habitat* of one of these appears to us to have been so seriously mistaken by many recent authors, that some little space may well be devoted to the investigation of the matter.

Whatever may have been the *Psittacus obscurus* of Linnæus (S. N. ed. 12, p. 140), founded on a "Parrot from Africa" which came under Hasselquist's notice during his travels in the East (It. Palæst. p. 236, *fide* Linn.), and at first (1766) identified by Linnæus with "Le Perroquet Mascarin." of Brisson (Orn. iv. p. 315), there can be no question as to the latter, on which, in 1771, was established the *P. mascarin*—an abbreviation most likely for *P. mascarinus*—of Linnæus (Mantiss. p. 524), that author citing also Daubenton's figure (Pl. Enl. 35), and adding "*Habitat in Mascarina*"—the last piece of information being doubtless obtained (for Brisson had said, "J'ignore dans quel pays on le trouve. Je l'ai vu vivant à Paris.") from De Buffon, who stated (Hist. Nat. Ois. vi. p. 121), "M. le Vicomte de Querhoënt nous assure qu'on le trouve à l'île de Bourbon où probablement il a été transporté de Madagascar." This probability appears very questionable, as much so as Buffon's assertion that the bird received its name "parce qu'il a autour du bec une sorte de masque noir qui engage le front, la gorge et le tour de la face." Du Bois, who visited Madagascar and Bourbon in 1669–72, gives the following account of the Parrots of the latter:—

"*Perroquets gris*, qui sont aussi bons que des Pigeons.

"Voilà le meilleur Gibier de l'Isle.

"Il y a de plusieurs autres sortes de Perroquets, dont on ne mange point; sçavoir.

mîmes à la recherche de cet oiseau, et nous en tuâmes deux. Le *perroquet noir* vit solitaire dans les bois les plus élevés; il mord violemment: la tristesse de ses mœurs répond à celle de son plumage." In a footnote he refers his birds to *Psittacus niger*, Gmelin (S. N. i. p. 336) *i. e.* *Coracopsis niger* (Linn.). Speaking of the same island in another place (iii. p. 64), he says:—"Quelques perroquets solitaires, dont j'entendis des sifflemens aigus, mais dont je ne pus tuer un seul, peuplent la circonférence du volcan." In this last passage he does not refer the birds to any species; but, from the similarity of phrase, he most likely considered them the same as those he had before seen and determined.

“Perroquets un peu plus gros que pigeons, ayant le plumage de couleur de petit gris, un chaperon noir sur la teste, le bec fort gros, & couleur de feu.

“Perroquets verts gros comme pigeons, ayant un collier noir.

“Perroquets verts de n esme [mesme] grosseur, ayant la teste, le dessus des ailes, & la queue couleur de feu.

“Perroquets tout verts de la mesme grosseur.

“Perroquets des trois façons comme cy-dessus, qui ne sont pas plus gros que des Merles.”*

Now, considering that Du Bois was not a technical ornithologist, his indication of these different kinds of Parrots seems to be reasonably good, and the first of those which he says are not eaten may fairly be identified with “*Le Mascarin*,” though the black on the face of that bird cannot be correctly described as forming a “chaperon.” But if we reject this identification we shall find that we have to account for two species of Parrot, both connected with the same island and, so far as we can judge, very similar in appearance, differing, indeed, only in the position of a black mark on the head.

De Querhoënt’s assurance was confirmed in 1784 by Mauduyt, who says (Encycl. Méth. ii. p. 196):—“On trouve le *mascarin* à l’île de Bourbon ; j’en ai vu plusieurs vivans à Paris ; c’étoient des oiseaux assez doux ; ils n’avoient en leur faveur que leur bec rouge qui tranchoit agréablement sur le fond sombre de leur plumage ; ils n’avoient point appris à parler.”

It is true that for many years past Madagascar has been given as the habitat of *P. mascarinus* ; it is therefore worth while enquiring into the evidence in favour of that locality ; and it will be found that—apart from the supposition, already

* ‘Les Voyages faits par le Sieur D. B. aux Isles Dauphine ou Madagascar, & Bourbon, ou Mascarenne, és années 1669. 70. 71. & 72. . . Paris . . . M.DC.LXXIV.’ (pp. 172, 173). This work, it may be remarked, attracted no attention from naturalists till, Telfair having given the Zoological Society a MS. copy of it, Strickland quoted therefrom the passage relating to the *Solitaire* and *Oiseau bleu* of Bourbon (P. Z. S. 1844, p. 78), but was not aware, even in 1848, of the author’s name, or that the journal had ever been printed—a fact, indeed, generally overlooked until pointed out in 1852 by Mr. Pinkerton (‘Notes and Queries,’ vi. p. 83), and afterwards by Dr. Coquerel (‘Album de l’île de la Réunion,’ 1863), but still more prominently set forth by M. Milne-Edwards, who, in 1866, reprinted the whole of the ornithological portion of the work (Ann. Sc. Nat. Zool. ser. 5, vi. p. 42, note).

quoted, of Buffon—there was nothing to point to Madagascar till Levaillant in 1805 declared (Hist. Nat. Perroquets, ii. p. 112):—"Le Mascarin se trouve à Madagascar, et même, assure-t-on, à l'île de Bourbon." Thus the locality commonly assigned really rests with this writer, so notoriously untrustworthy in the matter of localities; and it may be remarked that he does not adduce the shadow of a fact in support of his assertion. Buffon and Brisson are the only authors he cites, and therefore most likely the only authors whose books on this point he had consulted. He says it is rare, and that he had only seen three examples—one in Mauduyt's possession, another in that of Aubry, and the third in the Paris Museum, which last still exists. This is, of course, totally insufficient to contravene the direct statements of De Querhoënt and Mauduyt, that the species was found in Bourbon, to which statements the account of Du Bois lends greater strength. Yet nearly all succeeding writers have followed the assertion of Levaillant. The derivation of the name "Mascarin" furnished by Buffon (which, seeing that *Mascarène* or *Mascarina* was the older name of the island, is quite untenable) has doubtless been the chief cause of the error which has misled Bechstein, Kuhl, Vieillot, Lesson, Wagler, Hahn, and finally Dr. Finsch, or rather, perhaps, has hindered them from the right path. It may be remarked that not one of these authors has been able to add a single jot of information on the question of locality. Only two specimens of the species seem to have been preserved to the present time—that in the Paris Museum, already mentioned, and that in the Museum of Vienna, noticed in 'The Ibis' (1873, p. 32). Hahn's figure (Orn. Atlas, Papageien, pl. 39), published in 1834, was taken, he says, from a living bird then in the menagerie of the King of Bavaria; but what became of its remains at its decease (and it seems to have died since) is not known.

We now come to Rodriguez. Here we know of two species:—one, the *Necropsittacus rodericanus* of M. Alphonse Milne-Edwards (Ann. Sc. Nat. Zool. ser. 5, viii. pp. 145–156, xix. art. 3, p. 18), a large species, not inferior in size to *Lo-phopsittacus mauritanus*, whose remains were found in com-

pany with those of *Pezophaps solitaria*, and of which the latest trace is afforded by an anonymous manuscript, 'Relation de l'Ile Rodrigue,' contained in the Archives of the Ministère de la Marine at Paris (P. Z. S. 1875, pp. 39-42); and the other, *Palæornis exsul* (Ibis, 1872, p. 33, 1875, p. 342). The former has doubtless been extinct for many years; but the latter may perhaps still survive, and since the last mention of it in these pages a second example has come into our hands, through the kindness of Mr. Caldwell of Mauritius†. This is that of a male bird; and though not possessing the red alar patch, by which it was hoped it would be adorned, it is of considerably greater beauty than the previously known female. The specimen was killed by Mr. Vandorous, 14th August, 1875; and its sex is vouched for by him. He also states that the eyes were "black with a yellow ring." It (♂) differs from the type (♀) at first sight by its maxilla, which is of deep crimson at the base, gradually paling to horn-colour at the tip. The mandible, in life, seems to have been of a dark reddish brown. The top of the head is less grey and of a clearer glaucous than in the female. From the nostril to the eye on each side there is a distinct narrow black stripe, which is so faintly indicated in the female that no notice was taken of it in the original description. The black chin-stripe on each side is also well defined, and is prolonged upwards so as almost to meet on the nape of the neck. Most of the primaries are marked each by a dull black patch on the inner web near the tip; and the middle secondaries are also dusky black. In other respects the two specimens closely agree; but that of the male is slightly the larger.

The following is a list of the indigenous species of Mascarene *Psittaci* known to us.

(1) SEYCHELLES.

**Coracopsis barklyi*, E. Newton.

**Palæornis wardi*, E. Newton.

† Cf. P. Z. S. 1875, p. 647, where Mr. Caldwell adds, "I have seen several of them, though I never could get near one myself."

* Diminishing in numbers.

(2) (a) MAURITIUS.

†*Lophopsittacus mauritianus* (Owen).**Palæornis eques* (auctorum, *sed quære* Bodd.?).

(b) RÉUNION.

†*Coracopsis mascarinus* (Linnæus).†*Palæornis eques* (Boddaert).

(3) RODRIGUEZ.

†*Necropsittacus rodericanus*, A. Milne-Edwards.†*Palæornis exsul*, A. Newton.

It will be observed that we do not regard *Psittacula cana*, of which we may mention we have now seen specimens from Rodriguez, as indigenous to the Mascarene Islands. Its proper home is Madagascar, whence it has doubtless been introduced, though probably very many years ago.

XXVIII.—*Notes on the Birds of the Lower Petchora.* By
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[Continued from page 230.]

(Plate VII.)

EUDROMIAS MORINELLUS (L.).

The Dotterel is one of the species which we did not meet with during its migration, but which we afterwards found upon the tundra. We saw two pairs on the 26th June at Stanavoialachta, frequenting the low round hills on either side of the bay, and secured specimens. Judging from their actions, we do not think they had, at that time, begun to lay.

ÆGIALITIS HIATICULA (L.).

The Ringed Plover was first noted by us at Ust Zylma on the 26th May. A few were seen and shot at Habariki; and they were found sparingly in suitable localities along the river to Gorodok, where they became rather more abundant, frequenting the sandy tongue of land opposite the town. At

* Diminishing in numbers.

† Extinct.

‡ Barely surviving.